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## Kristine Aono Interview

Maureen Vela

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**Interviewer: Maureen Vela**

**Artist: Kristine Aono**

**Location: In Person, Barnes & Noble Evanston, IL**

**Date: January 29, 2017**



Photo courtesy of the artist.

*Note: the following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in ART 200: Art & Artists in Contemporary Culture during the 2017 Winter Quarter as a part of the Asian American Art Oral History Research Project conducted by Laura Kina, Professor Art, and Media & Design.*

**Bio:** Kristine Aono is a sculptor and installation artist. She has a BFA from Washington University in St. Louis and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. In addition, she has done residencies at the MacDowell Colony and the Virginia Center for the Arts.

She has received numerous grants from organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts (Visual Artist/Public Project Grant), the Maryland State Arts Council, the Painted Bride, the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund, and the Prince George's Arts Council. Kristine Aono has served on the Board of the Washington Project for the Arts, participated as a founding mentor of the Corcoran Arts Mentorship Program, created an arts-based mentorship program called ArtPartners, and served as a panelist for the NEA, the Maryland State Arts Council, and the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. She has also been a visiting artist and lecturer at George Mason University, Clarion University, and the McDonogh School.

**Maureen Vela:** Can you provide a brief biography of your early years?

**Kristine Aono:** I was born in Chicago and I have a twin sister, I was the fourth in a family of 5 kids. We grew up in the Edgewater area of Chicago. We lived with our extended family, so my grandparents lived on the top floor of a brownstone and eventually my aunt and uncle lived on the second floor then my family lived on the first floor. So, it was three generations living together for a while. We moved but eventually ended up back in the Chicago area in Arlington Heights, I graduated from Buffalo Grove High School. I went to Washington University in Saint Louis where I got my BFA.

I majored in sculpture but started out with a double major with graphic design. It was a little bit too much trying to do that. They were physically on opposite ends of the campus. Even just the culture of being in the sculpture studio then the design studio was completely opposite. The people in design were dressed nicely and always clean, then I would come in from the sculpture studio covered in sawdust in my brother's old hand-me-downs. I decided I liked sculpture better. But my background is that I really took advantage of all that Washington University had to offer. So, I wanted a liberal art education and I also wanted a really wide background in art- I took painting, I took drawing, I took metal smithing and photography. I took a lot of different types of classes. I think that was a good way to inform my own work. I wanted my sculpture to have a lot of possibilities. That was one of the reasons I majored in sculpture because I didn't want to be confined and I felt that sculpture gave me a wider range to be able to combine everything.

**MV:** How would you define your art and yourself?

**KA:** Let's see, I have always felt my art does not easily fit in a category. One reason is because I use so many different materials. I am also not the type of artist who- there are a lot of artists who work with a certain type of material and they go with that. They do great stuff that way. But the way I work is that I come up with an idea first and then I decide on the material. The work is driven by a concept first and then I follow that with whatever material will best convey what I want to say. I really don't like to categorize my work I guess. Although a lot of times people will say my work deals with my ethnic identity.

**MV:** When, how, and why did you first get involved with art?

**KA:** Oh, my gosh. I don't remember when I first got involved with art, my family was always, art was always a big part of our family. My mom is artistic she had taken some classes at the Art Institute when she was younger and we were always drawing my sisters and I were always drawing. And we were always doing things like making paper dolls and making things. Always making things building a fort. I remember we were playing with Barbie dolls, but we hardly ever played with the dolls, we spent most of the time building their houses and they were neighbors to each other so it was the houses that took over the whole basement and we made a city. And by the time we were done with that we didn't want to play with the dolls it was work just building the cities. I think in my family creativity was a big part of how we communicated with each other, that was what we did together.

**MV:** Who is the primary audience of your work and how has it been received?

**KA:** I don't know, I think it's really varied. I think some of the shows like this show I'm in and working on right now at Northwestern University but the audience will be their student body and who ever their mailing list is. I do know that there are a lot of people who are friends of mine coming in town, so other artists, family members, the Japanese American community has been very involved though the engagement division of Block Museum they made an outreach to the Asian American community. I came out in October with a number of groups with the Block Museum including groups like JACL [Japanese American Citizens League] and the JASC [Japanese American Service Committee] and I know they will be involved with some things that I am doing when I come back out in April for some engagement opportunities. Also, I will be out here for a talk that will be part of Northwestern University's speaker series.

**MV:** In the Washington Post's review, they addressed your art as dealing with issues of racial and sexual stereotyping. Do you believe that has changed or stayed the same in your art?

**KA:** I think my work has broadened. I think they were referring to a specific where I showed the kimonos. Those were definitely dealing with issues of identity, cultural, and sexual stereotyping. That was a specific review of that body of work. Since then I have been doing more work that involves audience participation or it involves working with communities. My work has become more about other people and less about me. When I first started out a lot of my work was about me, which is typical how work is when artists start out. They start with what they know best and that is yourself and its usually an expression of yourself. Every piece no matter what it is, becomes some sort of a self-portrait to varying degrees. I really took that very literally and dealt with really deep into my identity the first ten, twenty years after I left college. But it has become broader and is about other communities.

**MV:** Can you tell me about your new work you're making for your Block Museum show "If You Remember, I'll Remember" [February 4- June 18, 2017].<sup>1</sup> How does it reflect on the past to contemplating the present?

**KA:** This piece is a re-envisioning of a piece I had done twenty-five years ago. I was asked by the Long Beach Museum of Art to be part of a group show that would commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066. That order was signed by president

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<sup>1</sup> "If You Remember, I'll Remember," Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. February 4–June 18, 2017 curated by Janet Dees. Kristine Aono's work was also featured for the Day of Remembrance 75th Anniversary, Saturday, February 18, 2:00pm. Event description "February 19, 2017, marks the 75th anniversary of the signing of the executive order which called for the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Join us to commemorate this historic occasion through an interactive, intergenerational program held around the work of Sansei artist Kristine Aono. The afternoon will be spent sharing stories of internment, and commemorating this historically relevant anniversary. *Hosting partners include Multicultural Student Affairs and the Japanese American Service Committee, Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, Japanese American Citizens League, Japanese Mutual Aid Society, and the Chicago Japanese American Council.*"

Roosevelt after Pearl Harbor was bombed and this executive order rounded up all the Japanese and Japanese Americans who were living within 200 miles of the west coast. So, it was Washington, California, and Oregon. If you were within 200 miles of the shore you were interned. They did not intern Japanese in Hawaii which is really telling. So, all these people were rounded up including my parents and their families. My mom was very young she was living in Fresno, California at the time and her family lost everything. Her dad had been living in this country for over 40 years and he had a house house he bought, he just bought a car, and dogs and cats they even had chickens and a rooster.

My grandfather owned a store in downtown Fresno and when the war broke out they were told they had to get rid of everything. They were told the government could store some of their stuff but most of the stuff was either stolen or ransacked. They weren't given much time at all, they were given days to get things in order. Also, things that were very Japanese like kimonos and girl's day dolls all those kinds of things were destroyed. The Japanese Americans destroyed them because they were told that, it would look like contraband. My mom's family was interned in Arkansas for three and a half years. My dad's family was living in Portland, Oregon when the war broke out. He was a few years older at 13 years old. His family was interned at Minidoka, Idaho for three and a half years. This part of my family's history is a really big part of who I am because a lot of the internees after the war ended and they were not encouraged to go back home especially the Californians because before the war they had a lot of power, a lot of land, and the government was really trying to discourage having them all come back.

They wanted to disperse the population and Chicago was advertised as a place for Japanese Americans to go after the war. At the start of the war in 1942 there were only 300 Japanese Americans living in Chicago. By 1945 there were 30,000 so my mom's family they were among those 30,000 who came to Chicago. I learned little by little, things about the internment camps and my parents never talked about it until I started asking questions. In the history books when I was growing up, this was not in them. When I finally got to high school and took U.S. history there was one line in the book that mentioned the internment camps. My teacher knew nothing about it, so I started asking my parents more questions and they wouldn't talk about it.

I think part of that, is very typical of their generation. In the Japanese family 1st generation is the immigrant family known as the Issei, Nisei, Sansei. I am Sansei, but the Nisei generation were predominately children when they were interned. When you do something like that to a child it can have long lasting effects that they don't necessarily voice. My parents did something very typical of the Nisei generation when it came time for them to raise their own children they might have been unselfconsciously raising us very American. We were not taught Japanese which is very typical with very American names and we were raised out in the suburbs. Although we still did a lot with the Japanese community, like here in Chicago a bone festival is held all the time. The Midwest Buddhist temple held certain festivals and I grew up doing that sort of thing. We lived out in the suburbs but we'd come back in the city to have Christmas and new year's and thanksgiving with our relatives out here in the city. We would attend all the bone festivals and do those kinds of things and the go back out to where we lived in the suburbs.

But that is kind of getting off track, you were asking about this specific installation. This installation this time is it titled "The nail that sticks up the farthest" (*Figure 1*) the full phrase

“The nail that sticks up the farthest takes the most pounding.” That’s the translation of a Japanese phrase which is “Deru Kugi Wa Utareru.” This was an installation I did in 1992 twenty-five years ago at the Long Beach Museum of Art. This piece was part of a group show called *Relocations and Revisions the Japanese Internment Revisited*. I was asked to do this installation the curator was a woman named Noriko Gamblin and she came to my studio and was looking at some of my work and I had done this piece that was based on this phrase “Deru Kugi Wa Utareru” and when I found that phrase to me it described why the Nisei and Issei seem to be so obedient in going to these camps. It’s very Japanese, a very Asian thought. You act as a group, you don’t stick out, you don’t call attention to yourself. Whereas the more western phrase might be the squeaky wheel gets the grease. This is a more Asian thought and for me it explained my parents and their generation because they were all told be obedient, follow the governments orders and we’ll prove we are good Americans. That’s what happened and then they were rounded up and put in these camps.

That just kind of inspired me to do this piece. I did a smaller piece that was a wall piece that had the phrase written around the border but it only had about 100 nails on it. Even then it weighed a lot, to have 100 rusted nails on it. When the curator saw that piece, I explained that each nail represented about 100 people that were interned in the camps because I could do the full number of nails which would have been 120,313 and she looked at me and she said, “Would you like to do it?” and I said “Yes!” So, I had taken this opportunity and realized it could be in the size I really wanted to see it. Which would be a nail for each person interned in the camps.

So, that’s what this piece is. In the darkened area that is where nails are in the wall and they’re rusted nails to show age and this sort of pain. The main image that you see on the wall is of the American Flag and that’s made by having the rusted nails pushed into this wall. This wall is made out of documents and they are from the National Archive where I did a lot of research, reading all the testimonies that former internees had given before congress during the hearings in the 80s. The hearings were called the CWIRC hearings that stood for commission on war time in relocation and internment of civilians. This was when the redress movement was happening, there was an active movement to have redress made for people who had been wrongly interned in these camps. Soon after these hearings, then redress was given \$20,000 was given to each surviving internee. By that time almost half the people had passed away. The good thing that happened was a lot of the money was given to education, education on this topic so books were written, films were made. A lot of things were done that way which I think had a very lasting effect. Nowadays this is a subject that is taught in history class, and its more than one sentence. Also on the wall besides the documents of testimonies are copies of my grandfather’s letters.

My grandfather lived to be 102 years old and as he got older, he would write letters to everyone and they were very autobiographical so I found some of the letters and they’re part of the wall installation. It is actually a fake wall, made out of 1 inch Styrofoam, the nails are not pounded into the hard wall, you can actually push it in with your finger. This is a piece that involves a lot of careful measuring and insane math because the grid on the wall has 120,313 nail holes in it. The documents are wallpapered on to the Styrofoam background and by the time of the opening of the show, I have a little more than half of the nails already inserted into this wall, and they are inserted into this grid of holes, so there’s a hole for each person interned. By the time the show

opened I had 60-70,000 nails already in the wall and that's the dark area. On the main wall the image of the American flag is formed by those nails.

The thing about this piece being in LA, well Long Beach but it's LA county. In 1992, there is a very famous case the Rodney King, whom was beaten by police, and it was caught on film. At a time where people didn't have cellphones to record everything. But there was a guy in apartment building who had a very clear view of it, and took out his camcorder and videotaped it, that then went viral. While I was installing this show the Rodney King verdict came out which acquitted all of the police officers who had been caught on film, beating up this man. Because they were acquitted, riots stuck out and there were fires everywhere in LA. About a mile away from the museum there were fires and a curfew was put in place. I remember installing the show because it took three weeks to install this.

While installing this show the other artists and I were like, "What should we do? Should we be out there protesting too?" We were just in there making art, and we all realized that we needed to do this show. This was an important show, it was about social injustice, racial prejudice, and it was really timely for what was going on with the Rodney King verdict. The show opened and I have a sign that's put out and with bags of nails, to fill in the rest of the grid. The sign said "Please add nails to honor or in memory of people who had been in the internment camps." I was asking people to add nails. During the opening people are adding nails and it was great. Then I went back home to the east coast.

The show was up for about two months. After about a month I got a call from the curator and she said, "Kristine I just need to talk to you about something, because people did add a lot of nails to this piece, and we just want to know how you feel about it." I said, "Well what happened?" She responded, "They added nails, but they didn't just add it to the grid, they were spelling words, and they didn't follow the grid at all." In these photos, you can see peace signs, hearts, the words equal, joy, and sad, also question marks. Across the flag, it says "never again" and "racism still exists." For people who did these, it takes a long time to add that many nails. To write the word equal takes a long time, that's a lot of nails. Then "no justice no peace," which was the battle cry after the Rodney King verdict came out and is today. I told the curator, I said "I really wasn't expecting this at all, but I do not believe in censoring the words, especially when I asked people to participate." I was actually really thrilled with this piece. It has become a completely different piece, and not what I intended. "I really don't feel it's my piece anymore it's the public's piece. I really love this, I think this is really great."

So, they were relieved and these [showing a photo] are horrible reproductions--these black and white photos were shot by the museum pre-cellphone era. But you can see even though they don't translate as well. People did a lot and added a lot to this piece.

The piece I am doing at the Block Museum is a reinterpretation of this piece and it happens to fall, and was not planned this way, on the 75th anniversary of the signing of the executive order 9066. February 19th was when it was signed but on February 18th there will be events at the museum commemorating the anniversary.

**MV:** What techniques, materials, and procedures did you use for this new piece?

**KA:** Well, it's a lot of technique and procedures we used. I have some photos to show what we have been doing. So, this piece is very different, instead of encompassing an entire room, this piece will be on one big wall. This is a group show with five other artists and my piece is on one big long wall, and it's about 47 feet long the ceiling height is much longer than long beach. It was nine feet but at the Block Museum its almost thirteen feet.

This piece will involve the same sort of technique where the Styrofoam is mounted on the plywood, and that is screwed in to the wall. Then trims are filled in, a primer coat is put on, then I begin to wallpaper on the documents and the letters. The most difficult part it trying to figure out how to stipple the surface, this has been interesting, we have been working on different ways to figure out how to stipple this surface. We ended up figuring out a process, but I told them it was still the most difficult part twenty-five years ago. The solution to finding a way to do it properly was doing it with these little things in our hand. A Plexiglas sheet was done by another department that later cut a grid lot  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch holes. The whole thing is wallpapered, now we are using a jig to put all the holes in the wall. It takes an army of people to do this. It was done slowly panel by panel moving across, we are half way now. Hopefully we can get the stippling done tomorrow, but I started putting some of the nails in.

We will actually be working with some Columbia College students tomorrow, they will help us put the nails in. It is a big project it takes a lot of people and also just a lot of time spend planning everything out very carefully, because it has to look perfect. It is on a grid so it has to look right. I have these drawings, my working drawings for doing this nail sketch. It is done like this so I can put it all together. I have to very carefully pan out everything, and every little step on the way. It is a lot of work. I am recreating a piece, but it is still a lot of work doing it in a whole different space. Just a lot of math figured out, to show where the nails go and where the text goes. We are in the stage of starting to do the nails.

**MV:** How did being in Asian American exhibitions make you feel?

Like I said before, I am not making my art to be in a show. My work is chosen after I have already done it. It was work that was really true to how I felt. I didn't feel like I was forced to do something. My work is about being Asian American. I did a series of kimonos that were more or less a self-portrait. It was from an experience I had when I was waitressing at a Japanese restaurant where they had me wearing a kimono which felt just impractical. Trying to do a lunch rush running around in a kimono where you can't make a wide stride and your sleeves are hanging down, it really dictated my every move. I was just really frustrating. I have so much respect for the of the kimono and I love the kimono, I think it's a beautiful art form. But wearing one felt to me like I was being put into a stereotypical role. So, I did a whole series about kimonos and the rope wrapped around the ankle really emphasizes the fact that you're constrained and you can't walk and you're not free to move.

I did this piece and in all of the kimonos the interior is filled with something ephemeral material. One is filled with Japanese maple leaves, the outside is fabric dipped in Hydrocal plaster over an armor wire mesh I made. I took that idea and pushed it even further. There's one wrapped all the way up, where it is more about constraints and stereotypes. Then I did some hanging kimonos



that are also made out of aluminum mesh. This mesh is used as a gutter guard people use in their homes to keep leaves out. When I think of an idea I figure out how I am going to convey the idea. I at first thought I was going to have to use chicken wire--I hate chicken wire it cuts up your hands. One of the things I love to do is walk up and down the aisle of a hardware store. I love hardware stores, you get so much inspiration. I saw this gutter guard and it has a bit of a grid to it, in a diamond shape. I thought how I could work with it and use it as a design element. On this one, I sew the aluminum mesh together to actually make a kimono. There's different variations of this one, as an American flag and with leaves.

In the "Issei, Nisei, Sansei" piece the idea was how culture gets lost a little bit with each generation. I would pour black coal, gold leaf, and red maple leaves. It is kind of like a sleeve going down. When I was making this I realized I was pregnant. At first I was going to have everything pile up on the floor. But I realized the basin was like my unborn child so I made it a basin to catch it in to represent the yonsei. These early on pieces were small, about culture crashing about growing up in the brownstone in Chicago with the three generations. So, based on this work, I was invited to do an installation. I got to realize this piece larger. It had sand, and geta sandals, at the end was mud. The geta sandals were handmade my parents said they had to wear them to get to the mess hall to the other barracks because there was so much mud. People used old 2x4 to make these geta sandals so they could get through the mud. The third part of the path was a concrete sidewalk with rubber flip flops.

It was this kind of progression. Based on this piece and the other piece I had done I was invited to do this installation where I got to build this. I then got really interested in the internment camps so I decided to go visit all the camps. At each camp, I would take picture at Manzanar and the Owens Valley. I did all this research on the camps and got the opportunity to be in a show. Which had four different lives. I did an installation at Women's Museum in Washington DC. It traveled to the Japanese American National Museum in LA. It also traveled to Harold Washington Library in Chicago. Now it is kind of a smaller version of itself on semi-permanent display at Japanese American National Museum in LA. This was a piece called *Relics from Camp* (Figure 2) and it involved community participation, because I had gone to visit the sights of all the camps I'd been to national archives again finding all these archival photographs that were taken by Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange, a lot of photographers were hired by the government by the works project. Dorothea Lange, really did not like the job because they were allowed only to take certain kinds of pictures and that's why the pictures look so posed, you don't really see the real image of what was going on in the camps.

I always disliked Ansel Adams pictures of Manzanar because he made it look like a gorgeous place to live, he made it look beautiful, but it was harsh. The Owens Valley is a really harsh place to live, those mountains look gorgeous, but the summers are really hot, and where the camps were, were not great areas. It was land where nobody wanted to live basically.

So, I found all these images and they became part of this piece but even before the piece found itself, I was visiting the sights of the camps. I was collecting information, which is a lot of what I do, I do a lot of research, I don't know where it's going to always end up but it's a big part of what I do, is just research, so I visited all these camps. In many cases, you can still find the

foundations of where the barracks were or where the bathrooms were, the latrines, and whenever possible I collected artifacts if I could find them.

This all started actually because a friend of mine who grew up in Delta, Utah, which is the site of the Topaz internment camp, he sent me a box of things he found on the desert floor. He said, "I know you're interested in the internment camps, I just found these out in the desert and thought you'd be interested." [showing items] These are things he sent me--that's a baby shoe and its leather, it has survived all that time in the desert but it's a baby shoe. This is a fly swatter made out of a screen and a hanger. A glass syringe that says "US government" on it so it must have been from the hospital. Barbed wire, a rosary and some marbles, which I linked to that picture of the boys playing marbles. But when my friend Jeff sent me that, that's what started to get me thinking -my grandparents had these dolls that my grandma had made in the camps. They were made out of scrap fabric; the faces are old nylons. My grandparents also saved this nameplate it says "Y. Aono" after my grandfather's name--because outside of the barracks, all looked alike. Nobody knew where people lived. Some people started gathering all of this scrap wood and making these nameplates. Some people had very beautiful elaborate ones but my family, that's what they had.

I realized people probably collected things. This piece is called *Relics from Camp*. It has soil from each of the camps and these artifacts are actually resting on Plexiglas so they aren't touching the soil but you can walk over the surface. It has the same idea of walking over the glass. You walk over the surface, you can walk over the same soil that people walked over at these camps. Then there would be a collection day, each time we did this show, sometimes two collection days. Where the Japanese American community is invited to bring in their artifacts from camp and they'd loan them to me for the duration of the show. Part of this show is them taking their picture with the artifact and they write a little inscription and that notebook becomes part of the show too. All their donations show up in this.

When I did this show in LA, this one man brought in these slippers. Now when people were told they were going in to these camps-they didn't know where they were going, how long they would be gone, but they were told to bring what they could carry, bring only what they could carry. They had to bring your clothes, bedding, and everything. My mom didn't have any toys, a lot of people didn't have much, but they wore their best clothes. If you see pictures of people going to these internment camps, a lot of them look like they're in their Sunday clothes.

A lot of these people didn't know where they were going. A man Buddy Takata brought in these slippers, actually two pairs, and he said his mom had made them because they wanted to keep the tradition of changing shoes when you come in the house. You don't wear your outside shoes in the house. So, his dad had worn this suit to the camps, and when he got to the camps he realized he wasn't going to need a suit. This is made out of this hearing bone fabric. That is his dad's suit. So, his mom made these slippers out of his dad's suit. Another man brought in an eagle scout handbook that he made, handmade out of scrap wood. They continue to try to make things as normal as possible. He became an eagle scout when he was in the camps.

This thing right in the middle, an animal vertebrate, that was his neckerchief slide, because they didn't have the proper thing so they made things. His eagle scout neckerchief slide was a vertebrate. Then they made their own patches/badges.

I love this story because when I went to visit Jerome, that was one of the camps my mom had been in, so I brought my mom and my dad. We drove down to Arkansas, and it was farm land down there, they were growing rice and soybeans. We found the monument to Jerome, from the monument off a, there were a few farmhouses there with fields and fields of soybean but at the time it was rice. I said to my mom I going to just see if anyone is home, but my parents are really shy people so they just stayed in the car. I was knocking and knocking on this door, so I said, "okay let's just go out to that water tower." I could tell it was an old water tower from the camp days. We drove out there we're looking at the water tower, we could see that there was a pickup truck coming towards us with all the dust. The pickup truck was coming and my dad was like, "oh no, what do we do?" He was all nervous. I said, "Don't worry, just roll the window down." Then he rolls the window down. The pickup truck comes up next to us, the farmer looks down at us and he says, "Are you coming home?" And so immediately we knew everything was okay. That guy was so nice. He spent the day with us and he took us to lunch at the local place. At one point I said to him, "Would you mind if I took some of the soil from your farm? Cause I am using it in my artwork" and he said "Sure, what kind do you need?" and I said "Well, is there a difference?"

He began to tell me about black loam and gumbo. He said gumbo was the stuff that will pull your boots off. That was when my mom said, "Oh I remember that." Then I asked for a little bit of both. One of the things that I do is I bake the soil to get rid of all the organic material, just in the oven. When I baked the gumbo, from Jerome, it was a mistake, the gumbo was like clay. Then I had to ship these buckets of dirt to the museum in LA. I had to figure out what to do with it, because it had to fill the bottom of the box.

When we opened it up in LA the museum people were like, "let's take sledge hammers to this to break it up." When we had collection day, this one man came in and said his aunt made a figure for his brother out of the clay that was soil. People brought in really wonderful things, and their stories were the most important things. This is what I mean by as I start doing more work, it becomes about other people and communities. It's about the intersections in different communities too. Where I stated doing stuff that was more about myself, it then became about my place among other people.

**MV:** Does developing the concept from materials become a method of yours to use in your art?

**KA:** I think so, I found it to be a true way of working for myself. I don't like to force it. That's why I think I have been very fortunate. The idea springs from something I think of not someone else having me make things for a particular show.

**MV:** Are there any other stories you can share while you were doing your research for *Relics from Camp*?

**KA:** There was a big sheet, that was embroidered by the midwife. It was Heart Mountain and every time a baby was born she embroidered the baby and the mother's name on to the blanket. Crystal City wasn't one of the ten camps I visited. It was actually not done by the relocation authority. There were other groups that had camps. This was a Justice Department camp, which was supposed to be holding the people who were accused of doing something wrong. Which something wrong could have been that you were a Buddhist priest [or] leaders in the communities. But we included Crystal City because they housed families. All the soil was so different. They were real dark, sandy, gray and dusty, rich soil, that all had their own personalities. There was a Tule Lake baseball jersey, because baseball was a big thing. One of the things that was really cool, was that a lot of the places were desserts and dried up ocean bottoms. There were these seashells, but you could find seashells in the middle of Utah. People collected these tiny shells and make beautiful broaches and jewelry out of them. It was really incredible, they made a lot of things like that, just so incredible. But in the background of the show archival images would rotate to the present-day images that I took would be seen.

**MV:** Are you working on anything else besides this current show?

**KA:** I am working on a few things, but nothing I want to talk about here. I'm still in the early phase of researching. I like to let my work evolve in a thoughtful way that isn't forced. I'm also involved with the intersection of my art and working with communities and teaching. Years ago, I found myself being asked by museums where I was exhibiting my work, to teach workshops. So, I eventually got training in teaching. It led to me start a mentorship program for at risk youth called ArtPartners. I'm also the lead teaching artist for an organization called Arts on the Block<sup>2</sup> which engages youth in learning real life and job-based skills through creating commissioned, public art.

**END**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://artsontheblock.com/about-aob/staff-and-board/>

Figure 1



Kristine Aono "The Nail That Sticks Up the Farthest..."  
Nails, documents, wood, styrofoam, burlap sacks, 11 x 47 feet, 2017.  
Installation view Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.

Figure 2



Kristine Aono "Relics From Camp"  
Community artifacts, dirt, glass panels, wood, two slide projectors with dissolve unit showing War time images from the National Archives and present-day images of the internment camps. Varies by location. Each individual box is approximately 36 x 36", 1996.  
Installation view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC